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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Wow, what a fast week this was! It's been cold and wet - we even got a little bit of that white stuff! Winter has definitely arrived. The holiday season is in full force. Wasn't it just a short time ago we were all worried about Y2K problems, and now it's almost Y2K1?!

I don't have a lot to say this week. Thankfully, however, I can admit that I'm not from Florida! What a lesson in American political weirdness! It should be an interesting four years to come! Now, where did I put that glass of spiked eggnog?!

Until next time...

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Register NED PLAYER Without Any Fee

Now you can register NED PLAYER simple by sending card of your town or country to author. There have to be your email (for sending registering code), your name and type of computer you are using. This opportunity is time limited until the end of year 2000 (decisive is date of sending). The normal shareware fee for NED PLAYER is 15 USD or equivalent.

<http://www.volny.cz/sumbera>
Petr Sumbera

In our "It can't hurt to ask" department, Associate Editor Rob Mahlert sought out some answers from Infogrames regarding the "future" of Atari. Here's what he heard:

Subject: Infogrames & Atari future

Dana,

I sent an e-mail to Infogrames about Atari... here is the response...

Could you tell me if Infogrames has any plans with the Atari Hardware and TOS operating System?

Tom Richardson from Infogrames replies..

It is much too early for us to discuss specific plans. The deal does not close for months. Thanks for your interest and check back with us in the future.

Regards.

Tom Richardson

trichardson@us.infogrames.com

Atari 8BIT - Reverse-engineered ROM Sources, Third Revision

The third public release of the reverse-engineered Atari 8-bit ROM source code in CC65 format is now available for download from my Atari page:

<http://ch.twi.tudelft.nl/~sidney/atari/>

From the README:

"This third version focusses on supporting more types of ROMs. A grand total of 11 different images can be produced now (compared to two in the second release) spanning a wide range of Atari machines and ROM versions. Now it is possible to produce all three known BASIC versions, an OS-B/NTSC 400/800 ROM image, a 1200 XL OS-ROM image, and four versions of regular XL/XE ROMs. As an encore, two peculiar ROMs are included: the Arabic-language XL/XE ROM which comes from a very rare type of Atari that was targeted at Arabic-speaking countries, featuring an Arabic character set, and the 5200 XEGS ROM."

Any comments are welcomed.

Sidney Cadot
sidney@ch.twi.tudelft.nl

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### Atari Users Net Survey =====

What is your favorite Atari Game System?

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| 2600           | 16.83 % (17) |
| 5200           | 2.97 % (3)   |
| 7800           | 3.96 % (4)   |
| XE Game System | 5.94 % (6)   |

|                                                    |              |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Lynx Portable                                      | 11.88 % (12) |
| Jaguar 64-bit                                      | 17.82 % (18) |
| Atari ST(E) Computer<br>(NOT really a game system) | 40.59 % (41) |

Total Votes: 101

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING  
compiled by Joe Miranda  
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and we're bearing down on the holidays full speed ahead. I don't know about you, but "the holidays" seemed to last a lot longer when I was a kid.

I can still remember being a youngster and laying awake wondering what that jolly old man was going to bring me. One year, my favorite Christmas gift was a microscope. If I remember correctly, my favorite gift the following year was a small action figure with a "jet pack". You would attach one end of a string to an object, pull the other end, and the action figure would "shoot" along the string.

I can still picture my father standing in the living room watching me... and scratching his head. Of course I used the microscope for years, and the action figure for only a matter of months, but it did teach me an important lesson: The small things can bring as much happiness as the big ones. While tech-toys make my eyes sparkle, the little gadgets still catch my eye. Just ask my wife about my "toy shelf". It holds all kinds of curiosities from magnetic puzzles to optical illusion coin banks. Each and every one has its own charm and is special just because of what it is.

I'm not really sure that there's a moral here, but let's just say that if you keep the simple things in mind it's harder to lose sight of all the pleasures that are out there.

On another subject, we're over and done with the election... finally. While many people have long since gotten tired of the whole thing, I found it fascinating. The citizens of the U.S. have learned several things about their Constitution... about their Supreme Court, about their system of government in general, and perhaps, if they are lucky, about themselves. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be learning about this election in school. And remember: you... were... there.

Now on to the news, hints, tips, and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup  
=====

Eddie Griffiths asks about a favorite game from years gone by:

"I used to have an Atari STE 1040 and one of the games I had was a Strategy game and a kind of adventure game... this game was really cool..

The game was called TAIPEI or TAI PAN I think.. Does anyone know of this game ?? or who made this game ?? and is this game available to use on a PC ?? or I suppose you could run this on Winston emulator ?? or the Gemulator for Win 2000.?"

Steve Stupple tells Eddie:

"The game was called Taipan, and possibly by Ocean.

This program did have a minute little problem when it was first release! The boot sector wasn't a standard 512 byte sector and didn't run on many machines. Which may make running on an emulator a little harder!"

Jo Even Skarstein asks about a simple graphics program:

"I'm looking for a very simple graphics program that works under GEM and on graphics cards. I don't need (or want) any fancy stuff, basically I just want D.E.G.A.S. Elite that runs under GEM and is capable of handling multiple windows. Does something like this exist? No matter where I look I can only find either super-fancy photo-editors or stuff that bypass GEM altogether.

I need this to make some simple illustrations, currently I'm using Microsoft Paint (yes, I said I want something simple...) for this. Actually, a clone for GEM would be nice..."

Peter Persson tells Jo Even:

"Don't know where to find it, but try Prism Paint. It's a lot like Degas."

Jo Even tells Peter:

"I have it, but unfortunately it doesn't work with my graphics cards."

Jergen Nyberg adds:

"Have you tried Vision? Recently updated to v4.0, and another with some small bug fixes are coming soon. Works on all machines (I think)."

Djordje Vukovic tell Jo Even:

"How about Papillon V1? It was much simpler and smaller than later versions (the program was packed and about 100KB big), and, as far as I could see, quite regular GEM app. I believe it was available on FTP servers and BBSes several years ago; at least I downloaded it from -somewhere- then (maybe ComNet?). I still have that archive if it is any help to you."

Matthias Jaap adds:

"I would recommend PixArt - ok, it's isn't exactly a simple graphics program but it works great with graphic cards and GEM... and it will be released as freeware soon."

Jo Even asks Matthias:

"Sounds interesting, do you have any more info on this? Is there a demo I can try?"

Matthias tells Jo Even:

"There is an announcement by the programmers that the development of Pixart 5 has been stopped and they plan to release it as freeware. The current homepage ([www.pixart.de](http://www.pixart.de)) is currently not up-to-date. If you can't find a demo version of Pixart on one of the FTP servers I can send you a demo.

Pixart is a great program. It's easy to use and even supports WACOM graphic tablets. It can also convert pictures with a lot of dithering methods and handles GIF and JPEG."

Chris Friend asks about creating what we used to call a monSTer:

"Anyone have any info on putting a Mega ST4 mobo into a PC case?? Any info, links to even pinouts, etc... would be greatly appreciated.."

Lord Gaiyan asks Chris:

"Now why the hell would you want to do that??"

Lyndon Amsdon gives his reasons:

"I did it because my IDE 3.5" 1.7gb hard drive was crammed in the original case, and the extra load on the PSU (not forgetting the heat) blew the two big caps up on my PSU, literally."

Barrie at Keychange adds:

"To retain some sort of authenticity appearance-wise why not use a Megafile case ( of which I have a few empty ones ) for your hard drive with a separate PSU

OR.....

As I have done with my Mega 4, use a low line PSU in the Megafile case to power the mega, a hard drive and a CD rom, again in a megafile case, looks quite reasonable and saves all the hassle of using a PC case."

Shiuming Lai adds:

"If you're replicating the ports, which you must do to stand a chance of plugging in any compatible peripherals, then it's easy. Connect like-for-like (pin-out wise), and if the PC doesn't have certain ports, buy them (for example, the 13-pin DIN monitor output) and mount them.

If you're talking about using the PC power supply, that is also easy. Look at the original ST's PSU and check the +5/12V and GND markings (the latter are the black wires in any case) and see which traces they connect to on the ST motherboard, then adapt the PC PSU to that."

Tom Andrews asks about his new hand scanner:

"I've recently acquired a Migraph Hand Scanner. I have the hand unit and the board for the cartridge slot, but nothing else. There's a jack for a power supply (at least that's what it looks like), but no information about voltage or polarity. There's no manual or software.

How the heck do I use this thing? Is there some downloadable software somewhere? I have MVG, and there was supposed to be a scanner module for it, but I don't have it. I know the scanner was originally bundled with Touch-up, but I don't have that, either."

Grzegorz Pawlik tells Tom:

"I have a similar one. My AC adaptor supplied with the scanner gives 13V DC, 850mA. As far as polarity is concerned, the "inside" part of the plug is "+", and the "outside" is "-".

I have also looked for some software for that scanner, but unfortunately it seems only Touch-Up does work with this model. I may send it to you if you want."

Kenneth Medin posts this very interesting tidbit about his TT:

"Just to let you know that I have put my TT up on the web running the web server Weblight. The TT is connected to my Win-95 pc via a 57600 bit/sek nullmodem cable. The pc is connected to the Internet via 500 kbit ADSL.

The address is <http://atari.mine.nu/> but the content is simply the same as my normal homepage. Also some pages are missing.

Everything runs under Geneva/Neodesk and STinG so responses may be rather slow if I am using the file selector or so. Also I have no idea how stable this setup is if more than one user is connected at the same time. Should be interesting to see if the system is still up and running tomorrow morning!....

Just to let you know, Weblight is still running after 24 hours of sometimes quite heavy traffic on my poor 57600 line. 3.5 MB of data has gone out without any need to restart the program. I have been writing some mail in Okami tonight while people have been using the web server and there are some timeouts occurring now and then when Popwatch steals the only thread to wait for my pop3 server. Also some "Varning open connection" has occurred which, I believe, means the actual user can't log on any more?

I'm just about to do some expire, export and import now in Okami so I guess there will be more delays within Weblight."

Lyndon Amsdon asks anyone with a knowledge on this subject:

"Maybe this has been asked in the past, but all the web sites mention were for connecting an Atari to a PC via ethernet (I think) and with a PC running Win95.

I wish to connect my ST to a PC (386 laptop) using the ST as the internet connection. I'd like serial connection and software for the PC, but STinG v1.15 and above refuse to work on my ST.





->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Mattel Media announced the availability of Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots Arena at retail stores nationwide.

In the game, each robot starts his career at the bottom of the Bronze league and moves up the ladder by challenging and defeating other robots. As players advance, they accumulate prize ``money" winnings that allow them to add parts and create a customized robot warrior to take to the next battle. To win the Championship, gamers must challenge and pulverize a host of enemy robots, as well as dangerous boss-level `bots.

This title features hard core 3D Rock 'Em Sock 'Em robots based on Mattel's updated Rock 'Em Sock 'Em toy line. Ten menacing robots are each equipped with special weapons that are used to turn enemies into scrap metal. Players can combine fully modular robot arms, legs and torsos to unleash several unique fighting styles and combo attacks. Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots Arena gives players the power to rip off their opponent's body parts and attach them to their own or save the parts they collect to use against future victims. The title also features cameo appearances from the original Blue Bomber and Red Rocker Rock 'Em Sock 'Em robots who follow the action play-by-play as commentators.

Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. announced the debut of the first two college sports games for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, NCAA Final Four 2001 and NCAA GameBreaker 2001 from the 989 Sports development team, available at retail on December 19. The two titles join the recently released NFL GameDay 2001 for the PlayStation 2 as the newest additions in the library of top-selling games from 989 Sports.

''We are thrilled to bring our college sports titles to the PlayStation 2

computer entertainment system," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc. ``By harnessing the power of the PlayStation 2, we have captured the spirit of college sports and provide sports fans with the highest degree of realism and smoothest gameplay offered to date for these franchises."

#### NCAA Final Four 2001

NCAA Final Four 2001 will allow gamers to experience the intensity of the on-court action with intricately-detailed arenas and player models scaled to actual player height, weight and body style, including such details as tattoos and facial animations. Gameplay that blazes across court at 60 frames per second provides incredibly authentic animations that have been motion-captured from former college stars. Final Four MVP Mateen Cleaves provided strategic insight and helped develop the college-specific playbooks. ESPN's Quinn Buckner play-by-play commentary, real college fight songs and crowd chants, and arenas designed from actual blueprints further capture the spirit and ambience of college basketball.

#### NCAA GameBreaker 2001

Delivering a balanced attack of detailed graphics, great gameplay and a multitude of features, NCAA GameBreaker 2001 includes all 115 Division I-A programs, plus 64 historical teams, 21 bowl games, new player models and more than 250 motion-captured animations. The game features 600 plays designed by legendary All-Americans, Artificial Intelligence (AI) consultation provided by Washington Huskies head coach Rick Neuheisel and strategic input by last year's Heisman Trophy winner Ron Dayne, as well as animated play-by-play commentary by the legendary Keith Jackson. With Total Control Passing, quarterbacks can lead or underthrow to receivers based on the defensive coverage. Special moves allow ``GameBreakers" to juke overmatched defenders and a well-timed leap can tip the ball away from the outstretched hands of the intended receiver.

#### Activision Launches Super-Charged Racing Game, Supercar Street Challenge, On the PC and PlayStation2 Computer Entertainment System

Activision is taking the lead in delivering the next generation of racing games with Supercar Street Challenge. Delivering full-throttle action, the game puts players behind the wheel of the world's fastest supercars and challenges them to compete in no-limits, high-speed races through the streets of popular cities around the world. Supercar Street Challenge is expected to be available for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system and the PC in the summer of 2001.

``Our goal is for Supercar Street Challenge to set the new standard in racing games," states Larry Goldberg, executive vice president of Activision Studios. ``By combining the latest innovations in technology with the fastest supercars from the world's top car design houses and a ground-breaking car creation option, our sights are firmly set on creating one of the most exhilarating racing games in the market."

In Supercar Street Challenge, players can design, build and race their own supercar in no-holds-barred races through 16 courses set in seven realistic city environments including Monaco, Rome and Los Angeles, among others. Each location is complete with landmarks, real-time weather, lighting,

sound effects and more. Supercar Street Challenge features an easy-to-use styling studio that allows gamers to build their own supercar from the ground up, or they can choose from a stable of 10 supercars designed by such premier international car designers as Fioravanti, Callaway and Modena.

An exhilarating street-racing experience, players can smash through obstacles, careen over sidewalks, and drive through buildings, taking a number of alternate routes and shortcuts in pursuit of victory. Supercar Street Challenge features real-time car damage and deformation that affects handling, as well as a state-of-the-art racing game engine that includes advanced AI, amazing handling, realistic driving physics and high-resolution graphics (60 FPS).

Supercar Street Challenge is not yet rated by the ESRB.

#### Seganet Gamers Start Their Engines: Online Console Racing Games Added to Network

Revving up its online gaming network, Sega.com Inc., the leading online console and PC gaming company, announced the launch of Pod: Speedzone, Ubi Soft's first offering for SegaNet, the world's first high-speed online console gaming network. Adding to the racing excitement, Pod: Speedzone will be followed by Ubi Soft's Speed Devils Online Racing. Pod: Speedzone and Speed Devils Online Racing will bring an exciting dimension of competition to the SegaNet online console gaming line-up.

To celebrate the launch of these two highly anticipated games, SegaNet and Ubi Soft will be working together to create an online Pod: Speedzone tournament scheduled for February 2001. Sample CD's of these games can be found in upcoming issues of the Official Dreamcast Magazine as well as in Rolling Stone magazine.

"The online multi-player functionality in Ubi Soft's upcoming racing games creates a whole new experience for the console gamer as well as broadens the appeal and life-cycle of these games," said Skip McIlvaine, director of games business development at Sega.com. "Bringing them online with SegaNet ensures gamers will find opponents anytime, anywhere."

Both games will utilize GameLoft's network communications technology for game matching and chat services. Sega.com will utilize GameLoft servers on the SegaNet backbone that are optimized specifically for the SegaNet network and online gameplay in order to provide optimum performance to SegaNet subscribers.

"SegaNet offers an incredible new opportunity for interactive entertainment," said Laurent Detoc, president of Ubi Soft Entertainment. "The online community will raise the high stakes element of Speed Devils Online Racing and the fierce high-speed competition of Pod: Speedzone."

Pod: Speedzone, successor to the wildly popular 3.5 million-seller original, will be the first online combat racing title available on SegaNet. Racing in eight original vehicles on six multi-layered tracks, up to four players can navigate futuristic landscapes in a high-speed race for survival.

Speed Devils Online Racing combines muscle cars, high-stakes, non-monetary

gambling, and twisted 3D landscapes for a demonic racing feast. Gamers strive to become the fastest driver by out-performing the competition on one of eight treacherous tracks with one of 22 custom built hot-rods. Wagering options allow players to place high stakes bets to win in-game ``money," prestige, or even their opponent's vehicle.

The SegaNet high-speed online gaming network offers Dreamcast and PC users the ultimate in 3D multi-player games, chat, community, cheat codes, exclusive tournaments and content. Gamers can register for the service at [www.sega.net](http://www.sega.net).

### Christmas Arrives for 3DO on the PlayStation 2

Christmas has arrived early for The 3DO Company! The Company announced that the World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks game for PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system has been approved for manufacture and will ship to retailers on December 19, 2000, with the next title -- and several more -- to follow soon.

AquaAqua, developed by Zed Two, Ltd. and currently shipping in Asia and Europe, will be 3DO's second title for the PlayStation 2 console. AquaAqua, an addictive, fast action, 3D puzzle game of strategy and control set in a liquid landscape, has been completed and submitted to Sony Computer Entertainment of America for approval. 3DO hopes to release the game this month.

``With the release of World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks and AquaAqua we will reach our goal of shipping our first two PlayStation 2 games this quarter," said Trip Hawkins, chairman and CEO of The 3DO Company. ``We currently have an additional eight PlayStation 2 titles under development. We had originally hoped that a few of these games might also make the quarter. Given the current installed base of hardware consoles and the long-term brand and sales upside for the company, we have delayed shipment of two PlayStation 2 games into the fiscal fourth quarter to make sure that we deliver a superior game experience to our customers. As a result of the timing of these releases, 3DO expects revenue in the third fiscal quarter ending in December to be down 25 - 30% from last year, while 4th quarter results are expected to be significantly higher than last year's in both revenue and profits. Despite the shift in revenue between quarters, we have sufficient financial resources available to bring the remainder of our FY2001 product offerings to market.

``We remain confident in our ability to be the second company to release 10 games for the PlayStation 2 console in the United States, a goal 3DO hopes to accomplish by the spring of 2001," continued Hawkins. ``As a software company, this is the start of something we expect to be very big for 3DO. This is our first opportunity to be in on the ground floor as a major supplier for a major video game platform. And it doesn't get any better than the PlayStation 2."

3DO's planned lineup for release on the PlayStation 2 console through the spring of 2001 includes 10 titles in 5 brands: World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks, AquaAqua, Warriors of Might and Magic, Army Men: Air Attack 2, Army Men - Sarge's Heroes 2, High Heat Baseball, Army Men Green Rogue, Portal Runner, Heroes of Might and Magic, and World Destruction League: War Jetz.

### 3DO Ships Popular Brands for Game Boy Color

The 3DO Company announced that the World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks game and the Heroes of Might and Magic II game for Game Boy Color have shipped to retail outlets throughout North America and online shopping sites.

The World Destruction League: Thunder Tanks game is the ultimate in spectacle entertainment. It's an "over the top" battle-tournament where the contenders fight it out using tanks. This mega-event is broadcast on a television network throughout its post-apocalyptic society. Choose from nine different tanks driven by nine unique characters, and fight your way through seven different recognizable cities and environments with tons of awesome firepower. Five computer-controlled enemy tanks keep the action hot. Wreak havoc on the landscape, destroying power plants, Red Square, the Tower of Pisa, and more!

The Heroes of Might and Magic II game is a fantasy strategy game that pits you against diabolical warlords in a struggle for territory and resources. Dangerous enemies and mystical creatures roam the land and await any hero who sets out to defeat them. At stake is the ultimate prize: control of the land and the royal throne. Choose from among 40 heroes and gather men, creatures and materials for the fight against the other warlords and their armies. A seven-mission campaign will put your planning and strategic skills to the test. Turn-based gameplay allows everyone to play at his or her own pace. Heroes is easy to learn, but a challenge to master.

Both games are rated "E" for Everyone by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board with and carry the descriptor "Mild Animated Violence."

### U.S. Study Shows Many Video Games "Unhealthy" For Girls

Almost half of the top-selling U.S. console video games contain "unhealthy" messages for girls, including unrealistic body images, provocative sexuality and violent behavior, according to a study released on Tuesday.

"It's not a pretty picture of women. It's a very distorted picture," said Lois Salisbury, president of Children Now, an Oakland, Calif.-based child advocacy organization which commissioned the study.

"Children in America are consuming an hour-and-1/2 per day, on average, of online activity or video games. That's a steady diet, and it's an increasing proportion of their media diet," Salisbury said.

The Children Now study surveyed the top ten selling games for each of three popular console systems -- Sony Corp.'s PlayStation, Sega Corp. Dreamcast and Nintendo Co. Ltd's Nintendo 64.

Fifty-four percent of the games surveyed contained female lead characters while 92 percent had male lead characters.

Those games which do feature female characters tend to display women in an exaggerated and stereotypical manner, with 38 percent displaying significant body exposure, including cleavage, thighs and midriffs.

''In addition, 38 percent of female game characters had large breasts and 46 percent had unusually small waists," the group said in a news release announcing its findings.

Altogether, 54 percent of the female characters were depicted as fighting or being violent, while many also exhibited stereotypical female behavior and characteristics.

''The unhealthy messages that both girls and boys absorb from these new media impact the way they think girls are supposed to look and act," Salisbury said.

''For example, in certain games the females emitted a high-pitched giggle or sigh in reaction to different actions by the player," the study said. ''Their male counterparts, in contrast, had no such response to the same actions."

Industry analysts say roughly one-third of video game console users in the United States are female.

While the Children Now study said the games' negative female imagery delivers the wrong message about female behavior to both boys and girls, Salisbury said the study was more concerned about the girls since they are apt to identify with the female characters.

''There is an interactivity, there is an absorption, and the children who are playing are actually assuming different characters. ... That does a lot for identity formation," Salisbury said.

Children Now said that some popular games showed positive images of women, citing ''Mia Hamm Soccer" from South Peak Interactive and ''You Can Be A Woman Engineer" from Cascade Pass Inc. as two examples.

''This analysis is the beginning of putting out some fundamental information for parents and for the industry itself to reflect upon on images and messages that children are getting about what it means to be female," Salisbury said.

''Since most parents aren't playing these games, it is very easy for them to unwittingly sleepwalk through all of the images they contain."

Attention Holiday Shoppers: Gamers.com is the  
Ultimate One-stop Resource for PlayStation 2

Site Provides Real-Time PS2 Stock Updates for  
Major Retailers, Daily PS2 Giveaways, Extensive  
Holiday Buyers Guide, Bogus Retailer Warnings and  
Much More

Amid the unbelievable holiday shopping frenzy for PlayStation 2, Gamers.com, the ultimate gaming resource, has become the ultimate PlayStation 2 resource. Frantic shoppers and game fans can log onto the site, located at <http://www.gamers.com>, and utilize a host of resources created to help consumers track down and enjoy the coveted PS2 computer entertainment system, this season's most sought-after item.

Tired of spending hours every day scouring the Web to find for a retailer that actually has PlayStation 2 systems in stock? Gamers.com has streamlined the process by offering the PlayStation 2 "'Neighborhood Watch," an up-to-the-minute listing of PlayStation 2 stock availability at some of the top retailers on the Web. Shoppers can visit the site for real-time stock updates, and can even sign up to receive email alerts when PlayStation 2 units become available. Check out this cool service at <http://www.gamers.com/display/gx7/scanner/ps2.jsp>.

Still no luck finding a PlayStation 2? Your luck may change. Every day until December 24, Gamers.com will award one winner with a PlayStation 2 unit, plus a host of other great prizes. The "'Gone In 60 Seconds - The Great PlayStation 2 Giveaway" promotion debuted on the site October 26, and dozens of lucky winners are already enjoying their PlayStation 2 prize packages, which now include a PS2 unit, a killer Klipsch speaker system, seven PS2 games from Electronic Arts and Infogrames, and three months of free rentals from RedOctane. This is one of the biggest PlayStation 2 giveaways ever, with a total of 60 PS2 units being awarded. Check out contest details, rules, message boards and other fun stuff at <http://www.gamers.com/display/gx7/s/promos/ps2/redir.htm>.

Okay, so you're already a lucky, happy PS2 owner who's trying to decide which games are the best of the bunch. Or perhaps you're just a videogame fan looking for some fun new ideas. Look no further than the Gamers.com Holiday Buyer's Guide, chock full of ratings and recommendations on the best hardware systems, software choices, must-have peripherals and more. The Holiday Buyer's Guide covers PlayStation, PlayStation 2, Dreamcast, Nintendo 64, Game Boy Color, PC, and Unplugged games, helping everyone make sense out of the many holiday options. Check out the Holiday Buyer's Guide at <http://www.gamers.com/s/feature/001121-bg2000/index>.

Unfortunately, every now and then we run into someone who just doesn't have the holiday spirit. Gamers.com has researched a number of bogus retail sites offering to take your money for PS2 systems that don't exist. Beware of these hooligans - for more information check out <http://www.gamers.com/news/439632> and <http://www.gamers.com/news/441185>.

"We are pleased to assist videogame fans with the tricky task of locating, securing and enjoying a PlayStation 2 this holiday season," comments Geoff Mulligan, CEO, Gamers.com. "'From waiting in line to buy 60 PS2 units to giveaway online to offering the only real-time PS2 retailer stock updates and the most comprehensive, unbiased holiday guide, Gamers.com wants to make sure this is a very merry holiday for all gamers."

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FTC Approves AOL/Time Warner Deal

America Online won the blessing of U.S. antitrust authorities on Thursday

to buy Time Warner in a \$112.5 billion deal that will marry a new-economy Internet giant with a venerable old firm to create the world's biggest media company.

Under the watchful eye of a federal monitor, the world's largest Internet service provider will join up with Time Warner's movies, news, magazines and television programming, in a huge bet that combining new and old media will pay off.

The Federal Trade Commission voted 5-0 to approve the settlement -- lasting five years -- with a raft of conditions opening up Time Warner's cable lines to competition and ensuring consumers have a wide choice of content.

Eleven months after the biggest merger in U.S. history was announced, it still faces the lower hurdle of gaining approval from the Federal Communications Commission. This could come by year end with the deal closing shortly thereafter.

Time Warner has the second-largest collection of cable systems in the United States with 20 million households, behind AT&T Corp. (NYSE:T - news). AOL has close to 29 million subscribers, including 2.8 million CompuServe subscribers.

The breadth of the merger raised fears among regulators and competitors that AOL and Time Warner together would dominate the market for consumer high-speed Internet service via cable and a vast array of news and entertainment programming.

"In the broad sense, our concern was that the merger of these two powerful companies would deny to competitors access to this amazing new broadband technology," FTC Chairman Robert Pitofsky said.

"This order is intended to ensure that this new medium, characterized by openness, diversity and freedom, will not be closed down as a result of this merger," he said.

Approval came after AOL and Time Warner made a last-minute offer to appease some FTC commissioners, who were ready to go to court to block the deal.

"This agreement advances the commitment the companies made last winter to offer consumers a choice among multiple ISPs (Internet service providers) on AOL Time Warner cable systems," the companies said in a joint statement.

The new AOL Time Warner must open its cable system to competing Internet service providers, including one ISP before AOL launches its own cable service, and at least two others within 90 days after that, according to the agreement with the FTC.

Time Warner reached a deal last month with EarthLink Inc., the nation's No. 2 ISP, to offer high-speed Internet service in the second half of 2001, meaning AOL could not begin offering its own high-speed service on Time Warner's pipeline until then.

If Time Warner fails to enter into agreements with rival Internet service providers in the required time period, the FTC may appoint a trustee with authority to agree on deals, the agency said.

"It's a win for consumers because they will finally get choice in Internet providers that they can get over cable," said Dave Baker, a lawyer for



Atlanta-based EarthLink.

Under the settlement, that agreement becomes a benchmark for other unaffiliated ISPs to negotiate agreements to access Time Warner's cable system.

In Time Warner's smaller cable divisions, the cable operator will have to sign agreements with at least three nonaffiliated ISPs within 90 days after AOL's service becomes available, the agreement says.

The cable company can only refuse to carry more ISPs across the pipeline because of capacity constraints and other technical limitations but cannot refuse access to another ISP solely because it would hurt AOL Time Warner's subscribers, the FTC said.

The agreement also prohibits the combined company, which will be called AOL Time Warner, from interfering with content from unaffiliated companies that passes through its system, a top concern raised by content providers like The Walt Disney Co.

AOL Time Warner would also be barred from interfering with a consumer's use of interactive television (ITV) services provided by nonaffiliated providers, including interactive signals, triggers, or other content the merging companies agreed to carry. Complaints must be reported to the FTC.

The FTC was concerned that AOL might abandon its DSL service in regions where it acquires Time Warner cable, so the agreement requires AOL to continue to support DSL service and advertising at the same level in areas where it has cable systems and in areas where it does not.

Almost as soon as the AOL-Time Warner combination was announced in January, rivals and consumer groups voiced fears the new company could push aside competitors and they continued to drive home those concerns as late as this week.

But after negotiations that Pitofsky said went down to the deadline, the agreement that emerged satisfied some of the deal's severest critics.

"We think this is a huge step so that the Internet...will remain open and diverse. It's a fundamental change from what Time Warner and AOL wanted to do and what the cable industry hopes to do," said Jeff Chester, of the Center for Media Education.

It appears there is a good mechanism for outside parties to resolve disputes with the new company, Chester said.

The new company will marry Time Warner's Time, CNN, Warner Bros., People, HBO, Sports Illustrated, Cartoon Network, Warner Music Group, Fortune, Entertainment Weekly, and Looney Tunes with America Online's AOL, CompuServe, Netscape, ICQ instant messaging, Digital City, and AOL Moviefone.

AOL shareholders will hold 55 percent of the merged company, while Time Warner shareholders will hold 45 percent once the deal closes.

Microsoft said on Tuesday it will pay \$97 million to settle a long-standing lawsuit by thousands of temporary workers who claimed they were denied benefits at the software giant.

The so-called "permatemp" case, filed in 1992, involved Microsoft's practice of hiring long-term workers through temp agencies so it could allegedly avoid paying pensions, health care and stock options.

From 8,000 to 12,000 workers who worked for Microsoft company after December 1986 could receive payments in the settlement, believed to be the largest ever in a permatemp class-action case, plaintiff's law firm Bendich, Stobaugh and Strong said in a statement.

With more than \$20 billion in cash and cash-equivalents in its coffers, the payout was not expected to hit Microsoft's bottom line.

"The settlement will not have a material impact on our results," Microsoft spokesman Matt Pilla said.

The Redmond, Wash.-based company, which makes the ubiquitous Windows operating system for personal computers, employs 42,000 people worldwide, and between 5,000 and 6,000 temporary workers on top of that, Pilla said.

The settlement takes care of one lingering legal headache for the company, which is also battling in appeals court a federal judge's decision to break it in two to prevent further violations of antitrust law.

In addition, Microsoft is fighting dozens of class-action suits in several states filed on behalf of consumers who, bolstered by the federal ruling that it was an abusive monopoly, claim they were overcharged for Windows.

The "permatemp" settlement praised Microsoft for recent policy changes, saying that since 1997 it had hired some 3,000 former permatemps as workers with full benefits, and had adopted new practices to limit the length of temporary assignments.

"This case was brought to change the system at Microsoft and to obtain some compensation for this practice," law firm partners David Stobaugh and Stephen Strong said in a statement.

"We believe this case has achieved its goals," they said.

Last year a U.S. appeals court ruled Microsoft's permatemps were eligible to participate in the company's coveted stock-purchase plan, and earlier this year the company instituted changes to its temporary worker policy.

Changes over the last few years include hiring temporary workers from agencies that offer better benefits, and limiting the length of temp assignments to 12 months, with 100 days required before the same worker can be re-hired, Pilla said.

The average assignment was about 10 months, Pilla said.

"Microsoft continues to be a great place to work, and we value everyone who contributes to our products and services. We are pleased to reach an agreement that is acceptable to both sides and resolves this litigation," Deborah Willingham, Microsoft's vice president of human resources, said in a statement.

## State Probes Toys R Us Web Site

Records from Toys R Us Inc.'s Internet division have been subpoenaed in an investigation of its privacy practices, a spokeswoman for the toy retailer said Monday.

The inquiry by New Jersey's Division of Consumer Affairs, which is overseen by the state attorney general's office, partially stems from lawsuits that accuse toysrus.com of illegally sharing personal information about its Internet customers with market researchers, spokeswoman Jeanne Meyer said.

The company has turned over ``thousands of documents related to our privacy policies,'' Meyer said.

Mark Herr, director of the Division of Consumer Affairs, refused to confirm or deny an investigation into Fort Lee, N.J.-based toysrus.com, but said the division is examining how Internet retailers use ``cookies,'' the small text files that record information about an Internet user's browsing habits when they visit a Web site.

``As we invite our citizens to bank online, shop online, invest online, we also have to ensure that our privacy is protected online,'' Herr said. ``We have to ensure that they are protected from e-profiling and e-stalking.''

Both The Record of Hackensack and The Star-Ledger of Newark, citing unidentified sources, have reported that the agency is investigating charges that Toysrus.com illegally shared information about its Internet customers, which could violate the state's Consumer Fraud act.

About 12 lawsuits seeking class-action status allege that Toys R Us Inc. allows market researchers access to consumer data obtained from its Web site in violation of its own privacy policy. The suits, filed since last summer in California, Texas and New Jersey, also charge that Coremetrics tracked Web surfers' movements on a Toys R Us affiliate site, [www.babiesrus.com](http://www.babiesrus.com).

The suits focus on allegations that Toys R Us allows a marketing firm, Coremetrics Inc., to build personal profiles of its consumers even though a message on the Web site claims personal information is kept ``completely confidential.'' Plaintiffs are seeking to recover damages for customers who made purchases from the site.

Toys R Us has denied the allegations, saying it hired the San Francisco-based marketing firm to analyze its customers' data to improve their shopping experience on the site.

The inquiry by New Jersey authorities into the company's practices began a couple of weeks ago, Meyer said.

Bryan Clobes, an attorney who is representing plaintiffs in some of the lawsuits, said all parties have requested that the lawsuits be consolidated before a San Francisco federal judge.

Meyer said Monday that toysrus.com ended its association with Coremetrics last summer after a ``very short-term, trial-based relationship'' and in August asked Amazon.com to help operate its Web site.

Coremetrics was ``never given permission to share any of our consumers' data

with any outside party," Meyer said.

### Group Takes Aim at Net Auction Pirates

In a bid to stop a "new wave" of software pirates, the Business Software Association (BSA) announced Wednesday a set of voluntary guidelines to help online auction houses curb sales of illegal software at their sites.

The guidelines are necessary because "many of the people who used to sell software at card tables at flea markets have migrated to online auction sites," BSA vice president of enforcement Bob Kruger told the E-Commerce Times.

Kruger believes that the Internet has expanded the problem of pirated software to a "much larger marketplace." The BSA estimates that more than 90 percent of the software sold on auction sites is pirated, contributing to the US\$13 billion in lost revenues suffered by the industry annually.

The BSA's "Model Business Practices on Intellectual Property for Internet Auction Sites" calls for online auction houses, such as Yahoo! and eBay, to be proactive in ferreting out and shutting down auctions of illegal software. In particular, the guidelines call for online auction houses to:

- Prohibit the sale of pirated or counterfeit software

- Take responsibility for keeping illegal software off their sites by actively reviewing listings, verifying the identity of software sellers, and promptly terminating sales of illegal software

- Respond quickly to reports of copyright infringing auctions

- Post prominent educational messages on their sites

Kruger said one auction house that is already doing a good job at self-policing is Amazon, which monitors auctions at their site and already took action to stop the sale of infringing software.

According to Kruger, some of the other online auction houses do not take action to stop the sale of infringing software unless they have received a complaint from the copyright holder.

The Washington, D.C.-based BSA, a non-profit trade organization for software developers whose members include Microsoft, Corel and Adobe, said that its new guidelines are not only designed to protect copyright holders and the legitimate software market, but consumers as well.

Online auction houses may be simply high-tech swap meets, but buyers who purchase software sight unseen from Internet auction houses are at a greater risk of unknowingly purchasing infringing software than their counterparts at old-fashioned flea markets, according to Kruger.

Purchasing pirated software may save money for users, but it also places consumers at greater risk of computer viruses and gives them no access to technical support or inexpensive upgrades, according to Kruger.

The BSA is warning consumers not to buy software that is being sold for a fraction of its market price or that is described as "OEM (original

equipment manufacturer)," "Not for Retail," "Academic Version" or "Not Authorized for Sale."

Some unsavory auction sellers even market "backup" copies of disks and tell users that they must own the original software to use the disks. These "backup" copies sometimes arrive as a few disks with handwritten labels and no documentation.

The BSA has been aggressive about tracking down and prosecuting software pirates. Last month the group brought lawsuits against dozens of U.S. and UK individuals whom the BSA alleges were selling pirated and counterfeit software on popular auction sites.

The group also brought enforcement actions in Germany as part of the crackdown dubbed "Operation Bidder Beware."

"Software piracy on auction sites and the Internet as a whole is a growing problem," said BSA Europe vice president Beth Scott. "Through 'Operation Bidder Beware,' BSA is sending a strong message to consumers worldwide that auction sites are a dangerous venue for buying software products."

As part of its enforcement efforts, the BSA has also set up a toll-free anti-piracy hotline, 1-888-NOPIRACY, that consumers can call with reports of pirated software.

#### Microsoft Shows New Web Video, Audio Software

Software behemoth Microsoft Corp. on Tuesday unveiled new digital media products to send high quality video and audio over the Internet, turning up the heat on rival RealNetworks Inc.

Windows Media Video 8 could enable near-DVD quality video to be sent over the Internet at transmission speeds as low as 500 kilobits per second (kbps), Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer told a streaming media show in San Jose, Calif.

Although that is nearly 10 times faster than a common dial-up Internet connection, such speeds are becoming more common with the spread of high-speed Internet access such as cable or digital subscriber line (DSL) connections.

Ballmer also unveiled the latest version of Microsoft's audio format, Windows Media Audio 8, promising it could deliver near-CD quality sound at a recording speed of 48 kbps, meaning that a song could be downloaded 60 percent faster than an MP3 file of similar quality, Microsoft said.

"We're focusing on digital media at Microsoft in a big way because it brings excitement to consumers and real economic benefits to businesses," Ballmer said in a statement.

The announcements seemed to one-up similar recent offerings from Seattle-based RealNetworks, which has fought tooth and nail to defend its lead from Microsoft since pioneering the Internet media industry several years ago.

Although both companies are fond of sniping at each other, Microsoft's Tuesday announcements drew unusually sharp criticism from Real, which

scoffed at the software as a "futile" effort to match its products.

"Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery," Real spokesman David Brotherton said.

"We feel like they are playing catch up. They've announced a lot of claims about audio and video quality with very little, if any, independent testing to back them up," Brotherton said.

In June, Real launched its latest video offering, RealVideo 8, saying it could deliver near-DVD quality at 800 kbps. Its RealAudio 8 technology came out in October with claims of CD-like sound at half the size of an MP3 file.

On Monday, RealNetworks announced a new version of its systems software that enables Web sites to broadcast audio and video, saying it would dramatically boost Webcast quality.

The two rivals are also jockeying to deliver audio and video to handheld and wireless devices.

Microsoft on Tuesday also showed off media software for its line of Pocket PC handheld computers, and announced a deal with Japan's NTT DoCoMo Inc., which is launching a service using Windows Media to beam audio and video to mobile phones.

For its part, Real in June teamed up with Finnish mobile phone giant Nokia in a push to deliver audio and video to Nokia's next generation of phones due out next year.

#### States Seek Sales Tax Overhaul Aimed at Internet

At least 30 states will attempt to simplify their sales tax codes next year with an eye toward eventually capturing revenue from Internet sales, a key state legislator said on Friday.

State and local governments must streamline their laws to convince an unsympathetic U.S. Congress that Internet-based businesses should not enjoy special protection, said Illinois state Sen. Steven Rauschenberger, co-chair of a task force that is drafting model legislation.

"If we don't act quickly and show Congress we're serious, we'll have a real problem," Rauschenberger told an audience of about 50 state legislators and aides gathered for a conference here.

At issue are the \$488.7 billion in goods and services that Forrester Research estimates were sold on the Internet this year.

States are prohibited from collecting taxes from businesses outside their jurisdiction by a 1992 Supreme Court ruling on catalog sales, and by a three-year moratorium on new Internet taxes passed by Congress that is set to expire in October 2001.

Proponents of protecting the Internet from taxation say sales taxes would quash nascent Web retailers.

State and local officials, who rely on sales taxes for up to one-half of

their funds, point to lost tax revenue and the unfair advantage the exemption gives ``dot-coms" over traditional ``bricks-and-mortar" businesses. Forty-five states rely on sales taxes for revenues.

The issue is expected to come to a head in the next few years as on-line sales are expected to grow exponentially. Moody's Investor Service estimates that states could miss out on \$10 billion in sales-tax revenues by 2003 if the exemption is continued.

Businesses say the maze of state and local regulations that govern sales taxes would be difficult for them to sort out if they were required to pay taxes on their Internet sales.

The model legislation drafted by Rauschenberger's task force would simplify tax codes and enable certified third parties to calculate and collect the taxes automatically, in a manner similar to credit-card companies.

Registration, filing and audit processes would be streamlined, Rauschenberger said, and tax jurisdiction would be determined by the address of the recipient.

The legislative task force will meet next week to formally approve the plan, which is expected to be introduced into at least 30 state assemblies next year.

The streamlined plan is the best bet for states to avoid a scenario in which they are forced to raise property and income taxes to make up for sales-tax losses, Rauschenberger said.

If sales-tax reform is not enacted, he said, ``at some point in our lifetimes the sales tax just won't work anymore."

#### Domain Name Swap Meet Service Debuts

Register.com on Wednesday launched an online auction service allowing businesses and individuals to bid for any of the 20 million Internet domain names already in use.

The service, dubbed the Afternic Virtual Broker, will act as a middleman between bidders and the current owners of all ".com," ".net" and ".org" domains.

Register.com executives said the e-commerce site is based on the principle that everything is for sale -- for the right price.

"My shoes are not for sale, but if someone on the street offers me enough money for them, I'll walk home barefoot," Register.com director of aftermarket operations Chris Maroney said. "It's the same with domain names."

Afternic.com, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Register.com, developed the new service.

Bids can be made anonymously, and users whose searches of Register.com's database turn up sites that are already reserved will automatically be given the option of making an offer. Already, about 1 million reserved sites are listed as for sale on the Afternic site.

Bids on names not up for sale will be passed along to the owners, who can opt out of receiving bids if they choose.

"The reality is that purchasing a name in the resale market can be an affordable way to get the one you really want," said Register.com chief executive officer Richard Forman. "Considering that less than half of all registered domain names are currently in use, chances are your ideal name is available for resale at the right price."

After a sale price is agreed upon, Afternic will also serve as a broker for the finalized deal. The company will receive a flat fee of US\$100 if the site is sold for less than \$2,000 and a 5 percent commission if the price is over \$2,000.

The auction site aims to take advantage of an apparent shortage of domain names in the three main existing categories and also stands to benefit from the e-commerce shakeout, which has begun to claim dot-coms with well-known Web addresses.

For instance, earlier this month, Petsmart.com quickly pounced on the domain name and other assets of high-profile e-tailer Pets.com after that company said it would cease operations.

There are also signs that interest is already running high in the next generation of top level domains recently approved by the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN).

While those new domains -- which include ".biz," ".pro" and ".info" -- are not yet available for sale, a site created by VeriSign offering information on the new domains is reportedly being swamped by users.

Domainupdate.com has been down several times in recent days due to a flood of users attempting to access the site, according to VeriSign, which bought No. 1 domain registrant Network Solutions last year.

Those new domains are not expected to be available for sale until early in 2001. In fact, ICANN and the Federal Trade Commission issued a warning last month against online scams that claimed to offer the opportunity to pre-register the new domains.

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